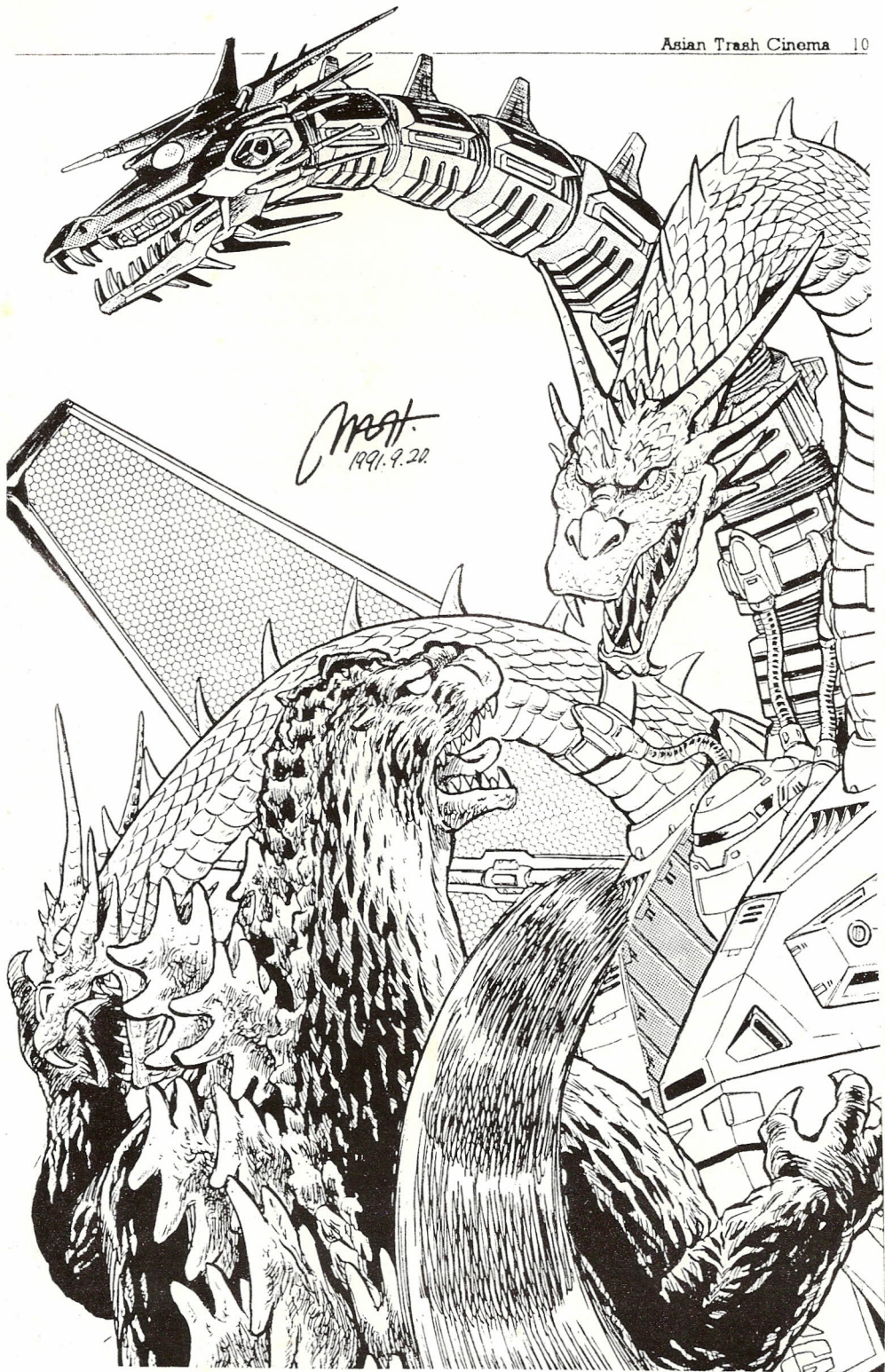


# Asian Trash Cinema

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# ゴジラVSキングギドラ

## GODZILLA VS KING GHIDORA

reviewed by Jeff Smith

The King of Monsters is back for his 18th stomp through the miniature cities of Japan, and while it's always good to have Godzilla back, **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** is a dopey throwback to the mid-70s Godzilla films, updated with tighter action and eye-filling special effects. 1989's **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE** was an attempt to make a serious "A" movie out of the rubber-suit monster-stomping that met with mixed reactions; sure, it was slow in spots, but it had vivid imagery unmatched in any previous Godzilla film, as well as a new monster for the Zillagod to battle. **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** is a bit of a step backward, an obvious effort to appeal to a wider (i.e., younger) audience; but what it lacks in intelligent scripting, it at least makes up for in vigorous, bring-down-the-house action.

Written and directed by Kazuki Omori - who also helmed **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE** - **KING GHIDORAH** takes place one thousand days after the previous film. Panic grips Japan as a glittering flying saucer soars through the night sky. Its crew claims that they are from two hundred years in the future, and they wish to save Japan from future destruction by Godzilla, by going back to 1944 and Lagos Island, where Godzilla - then just an ordinary dinosaur - was hit by a hydrogen blast and mutated into a monster; by removing him before the mutation occurs, they eradicate Godzilla from history. But the future people have hidden motives, and leave three small winged creatures of their own, which are in turn bombarded by the radiation and become King Ghidorah, the winged, three-headed beast that first appeared in **THE GREATEST BATTLE ON EARTH** (1964; American title: **GHIDRAH, THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER**).

The people from the future can now control Ghidorah and use him to destroy various Japanese landmarks. A new and improved Godzilla shows up -- this time created by modern nuclear waste -- and stomps Ghidorah, only to turn on Tokyo and begin tearing the city apart. Emi, a sympathetic future girl, returns there and revives Ghidorah, turning him into a

cyborg, and then brings it back to 1992 to battle Godzilla once again. Confused? There's also a sub-plot about a battalion of Japanese soldiers who were on Lagos Island in '44 and were saved from American troops by the pre-Zilla dinosaur; one of the surviving soldiers is now a wealthy industrialist who has brought prosperity to Japan.

The story is incredibly convoluted and just plain silly. Plot holes abound: Why do the future people stop in 1992 at all? Why not just go directly back to 1944 and accomplish their mission, without making a big production out of it? Also, once Ghidorah has been substituted for Godzilla, the Japanese government gets the bright idea to bombard the dinosaur (which the future people, for some reason, have teleported to the Bering Sea in 1992) with radiation to transform it--yet again--into Godzilla. This sequence is especially confusing; after discussing the possibility of nuking the dinosaur, reports come in that Godzilla has already mutated (the transformation occurs entirely off-screen) due to radiation that was--seemingly--already present in the Bering Sea. In his new form, Godzilla is "bigger than before" and able to absorb any radiation thrown at him. Although this sequence contains one of the film's most striking visuals--a beautiful shot of a submarine moving towards an immense, back-lit Godzilla--it is dramatically clumsy and needlessly obscure. Also, cyborg-izing Ghidorah seems an awfully roundabout way to defeat Godzilla. Surely some 23rd century technology could have been used to defeat the big lizard.

But after awhile you just give up on the film making any damn sense and enjoy the visuals. The production values are pretty high, generally on a level with **BIOLLANTE**, though they sometimes have a slightly cheesy look to them. Particularly impressive is the time-ship, an interesting two-level saucer design that always looks convincing, and King Ghidorah himself, in both his organic and mechanoid form. Also, the sequence with the pre-mutated dinosaur is impressively realistic, and is in fact more striking than any of Godzilla's later scenes, partly



because the suit design is closer to that of the classic Godzilla of the '60s and '70s. The final Godzilla suit in this movie looks rather strange, with a huge, barrel chest that makes it look awkward and top-heavy. However, the miniature work, especially the Tokyo cityscape at the film's conclusion, is spectacular, some of the best ever seen in a Godzilla film. For once, Godzilla seems of a realistic scale, not towering over hundred-story buildings, and this gives the film unexpected power and tension.

The most interesting aspect of the script is its depiction of Japan as a world power to be reckoned with. Omori extrapolates a future in which Japan's corporate structure has made it the leading world nation--"bigger than the United States or China"--and has become so aggressive that it must be destroyed! This says a lot about how the Japanese perceive themselves in the World market, and it should be noted that Americans are portrayed in the film as aggressive and stupid. During the Lagos Island segment we get blood-hungry GIs cravenly rejoicing at the (seeming) destruction of the dinosaur, and one officer states: "Looks like that island needs scientists more than *American military people*" (*italics mine*). Add to this, lingering shots of the slaughtered US soldiers, and the fact that all the American characters are portrayed by exceptionally bad actors, and you get a film with rather uncomfortable Japanese/American friction. And yet, the film is loaded with odd bits that seem put in to emulate American films (or at least appeal to an American audience, in the unlikely event this will ever get a US release).

The future people are aided by a TERMINATOR-like robot who, in one scene, has the skin ripped from his arm and part of his face, almost exactly as you-know-who in T2 (this robot's super-powers are depicted in a haphazard fashion, although one scene, a point-of-view shot of him running along a highway, resembles the pixilated stop-motion of TETSUO). Another time, a character shouts (in English, even), "Make my day!" while setting off an explosion. And, in the worst, most embarrassing scene of the movie (during the 1944 sequence), two US naval officers, on the bow of their ship, witness the shooting-star-like arrival of the time-ship, and have the following exchange:

**MAJOR:** *Enemy plane sir?*

**COLONEL:** *Impossible. No plane can fly that*

*fast. Looked like it was from another planet.*

**MAJOR:** *Shall we report it sir?*

**COLONEL:** *What? That we're being invaded by little green men from outer space? Let's just keep it as our little secret. You can tell your son about it when he's born, Major Spielberg.*

Unfortunately, the Japan/American element is fairly minor (one might almost say subliminal) and is generally subjugated to the action scenario. All **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** really cares about is delivering a thrill-ride of an adventure. Anything else--characterization, subtext, logic--is of secondary consideration.

The large cast is competent, if unspectacular: Isao Toyohara is Terasawa, a freelance writer with an interest in Godzilla who is chosen to accompany the future people to 1944; Megumi Odaka reprises her role as Miki Saegua, a young psychic Godzilla expert, from BIOLLANTE; Yoshino Tsuchiya is the industrialist Shindo, who confronts a rampaging Godzilla in one of the film's best scenes; and gorgeous Anna Kakagawa is Emi, the soft-hearted future girl who just wants to preserve her heritage. Also in the cast is the venerable Shoji Koboyashi, who played Captain Mura in the classic ULTRAMAN series, and later appeared in KAMEN RIDERS.

The bombastic, old-fashioned score is by Akira Ifukube; it enhances the feeling that this film is a throwback to the older Godzilla films, and with good reason: Ifukube wrote the music for most of the previous Godzilla films. And while the KING GHIDORAH score features a few dashes of electronic music that has become popular in recent years, it mainly consist of the fat, full-orchestra sound with aggressive themes and lyrical tangents that have enhanced many of the earlier films in the series. And, thank heavens, there is no vocal theme song.

If you approach **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** in the right spirit--it's largely a nostalgia trip, harkening back to the days when Godzilla was a good guy--it's a great deal of fun. Although slow to get started, once Godzilla and Ghidorah begin to duke it out, it is some of the best-choreographed, most spectacular monster-stompin' ever seen in the series. Some purist may deem this entry childish and insulting, and while it's definitely a step down from BIOLLANTE, Godzilla has never been Shakespeare. As pure, mindless fun, **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** delivers the groceries.





# SLEAZY RUBBER MONSTERS AND OTHER STORIES

by Max Della Mora

"From the depths of your oceans, Godzilla is coming!"

No, this is not the trailer for the next radioactive dinosaur episode, *GODZILLA VS TURDOMONGUS*, instead it's from the fake trailer for the hilarious *PORNOZILLA*. This 1987, 7 minute shot-on-video short was conceived by MEFI, aka Maurizio Arietti, ex-undertaker and free-lance actor (you can see him as the dentist in *MY LOVELY BURNT BROTHER AND HIS SQUISHED BRAIN*).

*PORNOZILLA* starts with a prowling camera travelling around a bathroom, where it stops at the commode. From the depths comes a growling plastic Godzilla toy, sans tail. "Terrific" appears on the screen and suddenly we see the King of Monsters fucking Gigan (he also appears without a tail, Freudian aficionados can

argue about this psycho-erotic tendency all they want) along with other giant monster toys. The two giants and their companions try every position in the Kama Sutra (including giving fellatio to the critter with his tail intact).

Then it's time for *GODZILLA VS BARBIE* as the big G bonks the All-American doll while she lays on a bunch of tomatoes. A blowjob follows that features Godzilla coming in gallons (thanks to a plastic tube filled with oozy, green shampoo) all over her face.

Gigan joins the action and when the two goliathons climax, Barbie rubs her body in the green pool of shampoo sperm. On the soundtrack we get various "oohs" and "aahs" borrowed from a Marina Frayase porn flick and at the film's end we even get the obligatory X-rating.



Wild and original (even if shot in the crudest of fashion), the fact that you can see the hands of the guy "helping" the monsters to copulate only adds to the pornographic atmosphere. *PORNOZILLA* is perfect at parties and a must-see for any Godzilla fan.

However, this isn't the only "porno" appearance by Godzilla. Excluding a Japanese TV program where the atomic lizard visits a brothel and entertains himself with a geisha (you've got to see it to believe it), Godzilla appeared in the porno-horror-noir *I WAS A TEENAGE ZABBADOING* (1988) by Austrian Carl Andersen. During the final orgy of the "zabbadoings" (basically vampires) with their victims, an inflatable Godzilla doll appears between waves of flesh. And, lest we forget, Debbie Harry gave Godzilla a French Kiss in an ominous music video several years ago (lucky guy!).

On a more serious level, Godzilla made many other appearances in shorts, movies and TV serials. It would be impossible to list them all here, so let me give you the details on the most interesting and obscure examples. Outside the official movie series, Godzilla (or Gajira) appears in unofficial form in an episode of the *ULTRA Q* serial (1966) under the name of GOMES. He's so made up, that you'll hardly recognize him, what with his long fangs, eyebrows (!) and other appliances glued to his suit (no doubt in desperate need of repair anyway).

Again incognito, Mr. G shows up in the tenth episode of a serial which needs no introduction, *ULTRAMAN* (1966). Here, the being from Nebula M78 confronts JIRAS, a Godzilla-like creature with a big fin around his neck. Curiously, in the American version of this episode, he is called KIRA and the scene where Ultraman rips-off his fin is missing. Perhaps it was considered by the American TV censors as being too violent for a kiddie show.

Godzilla was a "special" guest in Toho's TV serial *RYUSEI NINGEN ZON* (1973) where, complete with a poor-looking costume he battles, along with the serial's hero *ZONE FIGHTER*, Gigan and other monsters. Strangely, this serial was never released to the USA nor Europe.

Rather famous is the short *GODZILLA MEETS BAMBI*, a 1969 one minute cartoon made by Marv Newland, where Bambi gets squished by Godzilla's oversized feet. It played along with *GODZILLA* 1985 during that film's US release and even though it's not very good, at least it's

better than Hanna & Barbera's *GODZILLA* cartoons made in the seventies.

Much more obscure was *MATT BLACKFINGER*, a short video made by the mysterious Akko Kado. Toys are used rather than human actors and in the James Bond parody plot, a Godzilla wind-up toy stars as James Bonk. At the end, all the toys are in bed with Bonk/Godzilla and one of them says, "Oh Bonk, you're a monster in bed.". German director Jorg Buttgerit is a long time Godzilla fan and in his early short film *HORROR HEAVEN*, shot on Super-8, he creates his own Japanese giant called *GAZZORA*. With its intentionally bad stop-motion effects, a monster, who in no way resembles Godzilla (except for his name) battles toy tanks and destroys cities (their models at least). One other small note is the fact that Buttgerit used the soundtrack to *GODZILLA* in a baby puking scene from another of his shorts, *HOT LOVE*.

More brief appearances include Joe Dante and Allan Arkush's *HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD* (they credit Godzilla as a she on the poster!) and Tim Burton's *PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE*. In the latter, Pee-Wee disrupts a movie set which contains both Godzilla and Ghidrah.

Needless to say, in Japan Godzilla has been used in many amateur short films. One of the best is *GOJIRA VS MITOKOHMON*, a sort of one-man show where a single actor (played by the film's director) not only plays three different human characters but also Godzilla, Ghidrah, Giant Majin, Ultraman and Itto Ogami (of *SHOGUN ASSASSIN* fame). This doesn't even take into account the fact that he also portrays a human trellis destroyed by Gojira's radioactive breath!

By using some pieces of cardboard to recreate some of the characters' features and miming their usual gestures, he battles his own replicas (skillful editing helps pull it off) in this 12 minute 8mm short. There are even songs that use the classical themes by regular *GODZILLA* composer, Akira Ifukube. *GOJIRA VS MITOKOHMON* participated at this year's Japan Yubari Fantasy Film Festival but failed to win an award which was a shame as it deserved something for its fresh and genius-like approach.

That about covers the more obscure appearances by the Big Green Guy. If anyone knows of more amateur short films that feature appearances by Godzilla not mentioned here, please contact me through the pages of ATC.